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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS TO THE AMERICAN BUSINESS COUNCIL

1. (U) On April 14, the Ambassador gave the following informal comment to the American Business Council of Colombia.

2. (SBU) Text:

I asked Jaime for an opportunity to speak to you today because I believe something important is happening right now that affects all of Colombia, including the US companies based here.

The Colombian Congress is moving forward on the Peace and Justice Law. Although the debate is still in progress, Colombia is close to a decision on how it will deal with illegal armed groups. To date, more than 6,000 people have demobilized as individuals, and more than 5,000 people have demobilized in blocks. This means that 12,000 fewer people are out there threatening your factories, transportation routes, and employees. That's 12,000 fewer people causing your interest rates to rise. That's 12,000 fewer people diverting national resources to defense, law enforcement, and aid to victims. And there will be more.

I don't know what the final draft of the law will include. The law has benefited from a full and open debate, both at the national and international levels. I have confidence that although what will emerge may not satisfy everyone, it will provide a basis for demobilization, disarmament, monitoring, reintegration, and reparations.

The key is in the implementation. If the beneficiaries, after paying their debt to society in terms of the law, are not accepted back into society or feel rejected, they will give up. And, a very high percentage of those who give up will return to their former activities. Activities that have resulted in great harm to Colombia, including enormous disruption of your commercial activities.

As a political analyst who has your best interests in mind, as well as those of the U.S. and Colombia, I urge you to consider ways in which you can employ these deserters and demobilized. The former have run a great risk leaving the life they were leading. The latter are reintegrating into society with the support of their former organizations, making it a simpler process for them.

Some of the corporations in this room have experience in hiring former members of illegal armed groups. I believe that they would tell you that the experience has been more positive than they anticipated. The Embassy is contributing to the effort in its own way, supporting OAS monitoring efforts.

And, of course, we are ready to help all of you in any way we can. This is hard. I'm not asking for quotas -- like having one in 50 of your employees be an ex-combatant. But, the private sector is known for its ability to make practical and often difficult decisions in ways the public sector cannot.

Now is the time to put your heads together and find a way to make it happen. I would be especially proud if American companies could lead this national effort. Take the challenge. I think you'll find it's worth it.

Thank you.  
WOOD